

LETTERS
TO
THE BRITISH NATION,
AND TO
THE INHABITANTS OF EVERY OTHER COUNTRY
WHO MAY HAVE HEARD OF
THE LATE SHAMEFUL OUTRAGES
Committed in this Part of the Kingdom.

PART II.

Occasioned by the Appearance of a Pamphlet, intitled
*'A Reply to the Rev. Dr. Priestley's Appeal to the
Public, on the Subject of the Riots in Birmingham.'*

BEING THE JOINT PRODUCTION OF
THE PRINCIPAL CLERGY OF THAT PLACE AND
OF ITS VICINITY;
Having in its Title-page the Signature of the Rev. E. BURN, M.A.

BY THE REV. J. EDWARDS.

There is one publication, it is true, which perhaps it will be kind in me to recommend to your more serious and attentive perusal, and to that of all those in whose names you write, from your known passion for controversial superiority and ecclesiastical emolument; as I think you may with great advantage to your alma mater and coadjutors, employ yourself upon it during the rest of your life, provided you will undertake for once not merely to answer, but refute its arguments. It is intitled *An Appeal to the Public, &c.* not that I expect you will feel disposed to meddle any farther with this work, as we all know it may be traced to the same powerful and victorious hand under which you have already so very severely sinarted.

See the Rev. Spencer Madan's Letter to Dr. Priestley.

Birmingham,
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LONDON.



LETTERS.

LETTER V.

There then: How then? What then? Let me see wherein
My tongue hath wronged him; if it do him right,
Then he hath wronged himself; if he be free
Why then my taxing like a wild goose flies
Unclaim'd of any man.

SHAKESPEARE.

MY COUNTRYMEN,

SOME of you may possibly consider the Letters contained in the former number, as too light and declamatory for the occasion. If this be the case, I shall stand in need of no other apology for doing what was equally in my power to have omitted, than that of just hinting, that at most, they can only be considered as a preface or critique. In the first of these cases as an author, in the last as a reviewer, I, and *no one else*, am answerable for the sentiments delivered in those respective capacities.

That the present business is of the most serious nature I am well aware. A *more* serious event has not occurred since the riots of eighty, than the conflagrations which commenced in Birmingham on the fourteenth of July. Believe me, fellow-citizens, it was not with these I trifled, but with the laborious blundering of a council of clergymen,—it was with the ridiculous attempt to vindicate a conduct, which could then only hope to escape censure when it escaped observation. It was not you, it was not

the business before me that betrayed me into a smile—which by some was construed into indignation; it was the conceited importance with which a work was presented to the public as a faithful narrative of facts, which stumbled upon falsehood in the very porch. I hope now to prove to you, that I can be as cool and as serious as the reverend synod I am about to confute.

And if it should appear to you that in my former number, or in any part of this work, I treat the clergy with a contempt which, having them for its object, will be esteemed by many profane, yet, I hope to be believed when I affirm, that it is not because they are clergy of the church of England, but because, being clergymen of the church of England, they have descended to a baseness of conduct which would disgrace the most illiterate clown.* I smile at the bustling importance of the

* I am apprehensive, lest the detestation I express of villainy, should be considered as hatred against the persons of the villains. This, however, is very far from being the case. But nothing that has the appearance of malice, shall ever meet with toleration from me. I will censure it more than theft, wherever I find it, aye if it be in my own bosom. This vice is in every form detestable. Where it assumes the sacred garb of virtue and religion, it is doubly hateful. It then becomes hypocrisy, which is of the basest order of vices. I love my country. I therefore hate its foes. And surely, its worst foes are hypocrites of every description. I leave it to the reader's determination, whether, though according to their situation, and rank in life, distinguished by different names, they be not the most dangerous and pernicious characters in society. It is far from being my wish to say any thing of any man he does not deserve. It is, however, my business to fight against vices, and those who are guilty of the vices condemned, will always think themselves fallen under censure: and if they be not amended, they will be enraged. Men, resolved to continue in wickedness, think none their friends that do not flatter them in their favourite vices. They have ever considered their reprover as their enemy. And yet, I neither have nor shall say of some men half what they deserve.

Something, however, every one will allow is due to justice,—something to a much injured friend. I hope, for the credit of my country, I shall never again be honoured with an employment similar to that in which I am now engaged---that of defending one of the most illustrious characters, the world has in this, or perhaps in any other age produced, against the virulent attacks of malice, of slander, and of falsehood.

In

gentleman who has prefixed his name to the work, not because he wishes his brethren to be respectable, but because he has endeavoured to screen them from contempt by the meanest artifice. I would still hope he is an honest man, but I am sure he is a very mistaken one. He had, and he will not deny that he had, sufficient warning of the consequences of engaging in this affair. And when he run all hazards, he ought to have remembered an excellent adage, which is not to be disregarded because it is an old one, that says, "Experience keeps a dear school, but fools will learn in no other."

Far from despising the clergy, I am of opinion that their function is of the highest dignity and importance. To them is confided the privilege of conducting the devotions of their fellow-citizens, of dispensing the means of heavenly grace, of reforming, of enlightening, and of comforting their neighbours. Nor can I conceive a more noble and affecting spectacle than that of a minister incessantly employed in maintaining public order and union; exciting men to all the christian virtues by his exhortations and by his example; calming the troubled conscience, soothing the anguish of pain and of remorse, and propagating with humility and affability every thing amiable and consolatory that religion possesses. But will it not be allowed me on the other hand, that these ideas are necessarily and totally changed, and all respect immediately vanishes, when we see a shepherd at a distance from his flock, or taking the charge of so many as to render it utterly impossible for him to perform that which is his

In an advertisement, which appeared at the end of my last number, I pledged myself to the public, that if Dr. Priestley's veracity could be impeached in any instance, to prove to demonstration, that the book before me, was destitute of all credit. This has, I find, been misunderstood. What I meant, was nothing more than that I could bring such facts as would totally invalidate every thing advanced in the Reply; even supposing any fact stated in the Appeal could be demonstrated to be without foundation in truth.

indispensible

indispensible duty to each of them; I am sure you will agree with me, that a clergyman wholly engrossed by the gaieties and pleasures of the world, by the anxieties of ambition, or the low cares of avarice, are characters not entitled to more, but to less respect than those of other men.

It is, I am sure, notwithstanding appearances I am confident it is, to a *generous* nation that I, who glory in being one of the individuals which compose it, ardently desire to consecrate this and every other labour of my pen, so long as I shall be permitted to use it with becoming freedom. But this I will not do, my countrymen, by the high sounding words of a vain and pompous dedication. No,—I will do it in a manner more advantageous, and therefore, I trust, more pleasing to you,—by the discovery of truth.

You will not slight any advice if it be good, on account of the meanness and obscurity of him who suggests it. A poor man, as we are told by very respectable authority, once by his wisdom delivered a city, to the majority of whose inhabitants he was an entire stranger. But independent of rank and titles, to which I have no claim, there exists another greatness, that of character and of virtue. This may I, and every other person who seeks to enlighten and improve you, be ambitious to obtain, and through our whole course, whether in the senate, at the bar, or in the church, may it be our strife to preserve and excel in.

If there be any falshood in the pamphlet I am now controverting, you will all agree, that on an occasion so very serious, and to be followed by such important consequences as those of establishing or losing the good name of a very valuable and respectable body of citizens; *that* falshood, whether written with intention, or asserted through negligence or mis-information, ought to be detected,

tested, and exposed in the broadest glare of day. In the present state of things, you have an undoubted claim upon the contending parties for the truth. And with respect to us Dissenters, should we refrain in this instance, it would be to injure our reputation without utility, and to give sufficient time for malice to complete its work, by ruining those, whom it has already artfully defamed.

You are *all* my countrymen, those of the church, as well as of the dissent; and I have shewn myself capable of dissenting, even from those, who would be considered as more immediately my brethren, than the clergy of the establishment*. Were I permitted to be particular in any part of my address,—to Dissenters, I should say; ‘Slacken not your course, in that path of consistency, and public spirit you have hitherto trod, in spite of injury and opposition;—let not the little intrigues of your adversaries prevail with you to depart from it. Get, and keep possession of elevated and upright minds. Let your personal conduct, on this occasion, be consonant to the elevated sentiments which ought to animate you. Be the faithful guardians of those honours, which belong to virtue; and generously defend her cause; although deprived unjustly of many civil honours and emoluments which are, in fact, the birth-right of every native. If the public has been ungenerous to you, return good for evil. Silence in your breast the clamours of self-love, and proceed in doing every thing you can, to save an oppressed and sinking country, in spite of herself. Then if the most mortifying defeat attends you, you shall find sufficient solace in the sympathy and approbation of noble and exalted minds. If we cannot experience the satisfaction which would result from the enjoyment of the favour of our countrymen, we shall yet receive a higher glow of delight in the reflection, that we have

* See Letters to the Rev. Mr. Medley.

'truly and fervently loved those, whom, we are certain,
 'we have never deceived or injured; and whose esteem,
 'though it would be received by us as a favour, would
 'nevertheless have been only an *act* of justice. Still let us
 'never despair of our countrymen, they *may* be misled---
 'they *may* be withdrawn from the means of conviction.
 'But perhaps the time is arrived when this is no longer
 'the case. They are discovering their mistake, and with
 'open arms, will once more embrace us, as the best
 'friends of the community.'

I will conclude this letter with observing that I am
 deeply impressed with a sense of the dignity of that body
 to which these letters are directed. It is my wish, and
 shall be my endeavour, that nothing appear under so
 august a title that can be even *supposed* inconsistent with
 that respect which, doubtless, ought to be conspicuous in
 every part of such a publication. Still, however, I flatter
 myself, that zeal and application in an important cause,
 will be favourably accepted, and treated with indulgence.
 I will even dare to presume, that if the emotions of a
 mind zealously disposed, can supply the place of abilities;
 I shall be in some measure successful, in opening the eyes
 of a much injured and long deluded people, upon the true
 state of this kingdom, so far as the establishment and the
 dissent are concerned.

I could easily make professions of aiming at nothing
 but public happiness, and the prosperity of a country,
 which, with all her faults, I fervently love, and at present
 prefer before every other in the world;—and of a people
 for whom I feel more poignantly than they appear to feel
 for themselves. The late event at Birmingham, is of
 more importance than can by the generality be at present
 conceived. And I persuade myself, that if I could clearly
 demonstrate, the spirit the clergy have manifested in this
 town is only different in the effects it has produced, and
 not

not in its nature, from the spirit which pervades them as a body * (a spirit inseparable from establishments when subject neither to controul nor amendment) it would be an efficacious method, both to impress their own minds with awe and seriousness, and to moderate, in the mind of the laity, those jealousies, religious and political, which have been the foundation of bitterness,---the springs of strife.

At any rate, I cherish with rapture, the hopes, that, now or hereafter, a work quite unforeseen and unexpected by me, may be found to contain some sentiments, and some ideas, which will enroll among the well-wishers of ENGLAND, of HUMANITY, and of LIBERTY,

Your faithful Servant,

J. EDWARDS.

* However corrupt the clergy may be conceived to be, and in reality are, considered as a body, it would still be very hard and uncharitable even to hint that there are no exceptions---not even ten righteous among the ten thousand. It is with pleasure that on my own behalf I acknowledge, some of the most amiable characters I ever had the honour of being acquainted with, were clergymen of the church of England.

LETTER VI.

Mark now how a plain tale shall put you down.

SHAKESPEARE.

MY COUNTRYMEN,

IN disquisitions which relate to subjects purely speculative, if any such there be, or those of an abstract metaphysical nature, superiority will invariably be found on the side of him whose mind is possessed of the clearest, the most improved, and the most vigorous faculties. But in matters which relate to fact only, this is far from being the case. Here an idiot may confound the most illustrious genius. Nay, the meanest understanding may give the best testimony. Facts are stubborn things. They may be buried, they cannot be overthrown. No powers of reason, of imagination, or of wit, will, in this instance, in the least avail their possessor. Nothing can subvert facts established by the evidence of eye and ear witnesses, but a demonstration of their moral or natural incapacity for bearing witness. On this rock christianity rests. A rock on which the furious billows of persecution, and the idle surf of ridicule, have dashed and foamed with *equal success*, for nearly eighteen centuries. It is on this rock we shall now proceed to erect a pillar of truth, which, when finished, will lift its plain unornamented head towards its native skies, crowded with inscriptions of undeniable testimony to the worth of those sufferers, whose fair and unblemished names have been infamously traduced by a combination of clerical ingenuity and clerical honesty. This column, destitute as it will be of the gaudy deckings and gilded glare of falshood, shall nevertheless

theless beam around it a steady splendour, which, like the beams of the sun, shall extinguish each mimic blaze kindled by the adversaries of liberty, of religion, and of worth; the friends of despotism, of bigotry, of slander, and of mis-rule.

Without any farther preface, I proceed to a statement of facts. It is proper that your attention should be directed, in the first instance, to what has been advanced on both sides respecting the Sunday Schools. What was said by the clergy on this subject, has been already shewn to be as utterly destitute of foundation, in fact, as the most preposterous figment in the Arabian Nights Entertainments. Still farther, it has appeared that there was not only no evidence of the occurrence of the event, as stated by the clergy, but the most positive and direct evidence of the contrary. Nothing could have been more unfortunate for our reverend adversaries than this. This is absolute suicide. They placed this in the *front* of their array. It has fallen before the ark of truth, and the idol of their imagination is dismembered on the threshold.

As this publication may penetrate farther than the Weekly Chronicles of Aris and Swinney, the public will see the propriety of my putting down the whole affair in its completest form. And this I shall do as near as may, be in the words of the respective gentlemen, who have written on this occasion.

The Extracts from the Reply are, for the sake of distinction, printed in italics. It is also requested of the reader to pay attention to the notes at the bottom of the page.

TO persons at a distance, it may appear trifling to follow the Doctor in his detail of incidents, in themselves of so local and uninteresting a nature;---but his object in bringing them before the public is perfectly intelligible. Reply p. 6.

This affair which the clergy now affect to call uninteresting, and which they here treat with so much cool indifference, was not always viewed in the same light by those reverend gentlemen. It is but very lately they have discovered it to be so very diminutive as scarcely to be worthy the notice even of the persons concerned and on the spot, much less those at a distance. Full proof of this the reader will find in the note at the bottom of the page*. From this it appears, that on March 6, 1786, they thought the object of the Dissenters application of such magnitude, and to be so creative of alarm to the whole body of subscribers, as to induce "the Committee to think it incumbent on them to call a general meeting of the subscribers, &c.;" and still farther, to give in addition to this, a *nota bene*, reiterating their former sentiment, in these stronger expressions, "As the *business* is of *no small importance*, it is hoped that *every* well-wisher to the institution, will *make a point* of attending.

Extract from Aris's Birmingham Gazette.

" Birmingham, March 6, 1786,

" SUNDAY SCHOOLS.

" An application having been made by the Dissenters, for their children to have the privilege of going to their own place of worship, on the Sunday, which cannot be complied with, without an alteration in the sixth and tenth rules of the institution: The Committee think it incumbent on them to call a general meeting of the subscribers, to be held at the Public Office, on Friday evening, the 10th instant, at five o'clock precisely.

" *N. B.* As the *business* is of *no small importance*, it is hoped that every well-wisher to the institution, will make a point of attending.

" By order of the Committee,

" JOSEPH DOLEY, Secretary."

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In this short sentence, therefore, the reader will find one of those instances which obliges us to lament the want of that steady adherence to truth, which is eminently expected from the pens of the clergy, but which he will find too little visible throughout the whole of this ingenious performance.

He would have the country to understand, that these several circumstances, however inconsiderable they may appear, were but the parts of a regular system of prejudice which had long been forming against the Dissenters. ib.

In reply to this it may with truth be affirmed, that Dr. Priestley had no wish that "the country should understand that these several circumstances, however inconsiderable they may appear, were but the parts of a regular system of prejudice."

What is meant by a regular system of prejudice, let the writers of the Reply explain. I confess the phrase never before fell within the compass of my reading. I have heard of being prejudiced in favour of a system, but never before either heard or read of a system of prejudice, much less of a "regular system of prejudice." This expression, therefore, destroying its own sense, being what is commonly called a solecism, renders the whole sentence perfectly unmeaning. But whatever the reverend council intended should be the meaning of this sentence, respecting the formation of a "regular system of prejudice against the Dissenters," none but these gentlemen, no, nor even these gentlemen themselves, would from any thing to be met with in the Appeal, have made this observation, had they not been somehow conscious to the charge of fomenting bigotry, by working upon the prejudices of men's minds. *The fact is, the shoe pinches in this place, and they feel it.*

It is with this view, and to prepare the public the better for his grand conclusion, viz. that the late riots originated with Churchmen, and were even countenanced at the time by the clergy and laity of Birmingham, that he endeavours to detect what he calls the bigotry of the high church party, in the conduct of Sunday Schools. ib.

In this sentence the clergy, in as ingenious a manner as they are capable of, insinuate three things; *first*, That the Doctor wished, by adverting to the conduct of the high church party, respecting Sunday Schools, to prepare the public mind for the reception of a fallhood. This charge, however artfully insinuated, how warily soever expressed, on behalf of the Doctor, I flatly deny, and challenge the whole Synod, with all their powers of logic and declamation to demonstrate.

Secondly, That the late riots did not originate, and were not even countenanced by the clergy or laity of Birmingham. Whether this allegation be true or false, will be clearly made out to the entire satisfaction of the public, in the course of these numbers.

Thirdly, That the high church party did not exhibit any specimen of that bigotry, for which they have for half a century past been eminently conspicuous, in the conduct of Sunday Schools, and by consequence that what the Doctor asserts, on this head, is utterly false. The reader will soon find that this insinuation is quite unfounded, and, therefore, defamatory.

It happens, however, unfortunately for his purpose, that either through misinformation, or from a settled plan of perverting and rendering odious the conduct of others, he has totally misrepresented this plain business. ib.

In

In answer to this, I pledge myself to the public to make it most evidently appear that this plain business, which undoubtedly originated in the source to which the Doctor traces it, *happens very unfortunately* for the candid purpose of the reverend Synod, *either through misinformation, or from a settled plan of perverting and rendering odious the conduct of good men, to be here totally misrepresented.*

On the first establishment of this excellent charity in Birmingham, it was made an express law of the institution, that the children educated in the schools, should attend on the worship of the Established Church only; and on this plan were the schools conducted for a considerable time with unanimity and success. p. 7.

This sentence, instead of affording any refutation of the Doctor's charge, contains within itself, an irrefragable proof of its being founded in truth. It is a direct contradiction of what the reverend authors have before advanced, and the "EXPRESS LAW," is at once, a proof and an instance of the inveteracy, as well as existence, of that bigotry, against which, our venerable divines would insinuate the Doctor to have exclaimed without reason and without justice.

At length some of the subscribers, who were Dissenters, objected to this limitation respecting the attendance on divine worship;---they thought it necessary that "the children of Dissenters should have the benefit of "Sunday Schools, without being obliged to desert their "own places of worship." ib.

I have only to remark on this passage the insidiousness of the language, "Some of the subscribers, who were Dissenters," as though none but Dissenters would have objected to the illiberal rule; and as if but a very small number, of even the dissenting subscribers, had been so extremely

trremely unreasonable as to hint their discontent against a law founded in such palpable bigotry---“ They, i. e. Dissenters, thought it necessary,” as though every other subscriber esteemed it unnecessary, childish and absurd, which will be found to be quite the reverse, when we come to the fact. That “ the children of Dissenters should have the *benefit* of Sunday Schools,” as though it depended upon high churchmen whether or not the Dissenters should avail themselves of the advantages resulting from the institution of Sunday Schools. By the exertion of a spirit, which will for ever do them honour, the Dissenters have shewn the world they were not so poorly dependant upon the influence of the clerical combination. They have erected, for themselves, an institution of a similar nature, which has flourished; and which, in spite of the persecution raised by their adversaries, still continues to flourish, both with respect to increase of numbers and success; while those belonging to the high church party, deprived of the energy, the ability, and industry of Dissenters, look green and sickly; and are so diminished in numbers and reputation, as to occasion their conductors to view with longing eyes the liberal purses * and diligent attentions of the Dissenters; their own funds, and their own activity being found insufficient for the purpose of supporting their schools---in the very low state into which they have gradually dwindled from the period in which the Dissenters withdrew their friendly assistance.

* Several of the Dissenters were compelled by the illiberality of the members of the establishment, who formed a considerable majority in this instance, to desist from encouraging the Sunday Schools of the church, to which, before the rescinding of the rule which permitted the children of Dissenters to worship with their parents, they were as liberal in their contributions, as they are now to their own. Even *now*, notwithstanding the very unmanly and unbritonlike, as well as unchristian behaviour of those who consider *themselves alone* as members of the true Church of Christ, and all others as of the *Synagogue of Satan*, even now they do not scruple to receive *dissenting money*, and have not scrupled to solicit *dissenting subscriptions*. Are *intolerance* and *impudence* necessarily connected?

This very reasonable alteration was submitted to the committee of the day, who in consequence convened a general meeting of the subscribers, for the express purpose of determining on the expediency of the proposed regulation. ib.

In this sentence, all I request of the reader is, to observe, that the clergy confess in the most ample manner, "This alteration to be *very reasonable*." They will, therefore, in the superabundance of their condescension, perhaps allow, what is indeed a necessary consequence, that, when once made, it ought not to have been rescinded.

At this meeting it was resolved, agreeably to the wish of the Dissenters, that the children should attend "once in the day at least at such places of public worship, as their parents should appoint,"---at the same time it was expressly enjoined, that the patron who might recommend a Dissenter's child, should engage for its regular attendance at the place of worship fixed on by the parent. ib.*

"Agreeably to the wish of the Dissenters," as though they had been the children, and this was complied with by the more manly members of the establishment to please them. At the same time it was *expressly* enjoined

* The tenth law of the institution, stood originally as follows: "That the scholars in each district, with their respective teachers, go to church or chapel once in the day at least." To this the following addition was made, at the instance of several very respectable Dissenters; "Or such other place of public worship as shall be appointed by their parents"

Strange that there should be any occasion for such an addition as this. It constitutes another proof of high church bigotry. These persons whom Mr. Secretary is pleased to stile respectable, found themselves under a necessity to move an explanatory clause, lest after the law was made, they should confine the word chapel to mean no other than church-chapels. What stronger proof than this can be given of the actual existence of high church bigotry

that

that the patron who might recommend a *Dissenter's child*, should engage for its regular attendance at the place of worship fixed on by the *parent*. Would not you suppose from this, my countrymen, that Dissenters had no regard to religion and none to the sabbath, else why this express injunction with respect to a *Dissenter's child*. Let the crowded seats, and regular attendance at the time and place of worship of the *impious Dissenters*, speak to this insinuation.

The design of the latter regulation was to prevent an inconvenience, which many of the subscribers had apprehended might otherwise follow from the measure—which was, that when once the children ceased to be accountable to the general committee for their conduct, during the hours of divine service on the Sunday, there would be great danger of their not attending any place of worship at all.

The negligence of parents, together with the too great disposition which children, in that situation of life, generally discover of neglecting the plainest duties of the Sabbath, sufficiently justified this apprehension. p. 8.

It was perfectly right that every child in the Sunday School should “be accountable to the general committee for their conduct during the hours,” not merely of “divine service” but of every other hour in which such child might receive the benefit, resulting from admission into the school. I will not be so uncharitable as to affirm that the omission of a tolerating rule, with respect to religion, in a case where the established sect joined the dissenting sect, which one should have thought would from that circumstance, have immediately suggested itself to any thinking well-informed mind; might not possibly be owing to negligence and inattention to this so plain business. Notwithstanding the plausibility of remark in the first, and the moralizing turn, of the last sentence, equally worthy of our admiration, and our applause, if they can

can be charitably conceived in any degree to diminish the blame incurred by the guilt of omission in this instance, I am sure they do not in the least that of the bigotry of rescinding.*

Thus the business was, in all appearance, amicably adjusted---the Dissenters wished to put the institution upon what appeared to them a more liberal footing, and in this the members of the Establishment concurred with them.

It is with peculiar propriety the words "In all appearance," are applied in this instance. The reader will soon see that the "amicable adjustment of this business," was, on the side of the *high church party*, all appearance, and nothing else.

The remaining part of the sentence insinuates, that the Dissenters, however they might wish to put the institution upon a more liberal footing, yet did not actually do this, but only in appearance, or as it appeared to them, poor deluded people! And next, that the members of the establishment, to humour the Dissenters (I suppose) *did* concur with them, though with a considerable degree of reluctance. What is here only insinuated, has been shewn by the event, to have been, in reality, the true state of the case. It is most evident, from the votes on the occasion, above mentioned, that they concurred very reluctantly. And I cannot help thinking, that any man, after having considered the construction of this sentence, would concur with me in the conclusion, that the drift of the writer of it was to make it believed, that this alteration, which, in another place, he calls reasonable, was, in fact, improper and illiberal, tending to injury and debasement; and which none of the wiser sons of the established sect would ever have fallen in with, but for the sake of pacifying the childish discontent of the silly Dissenters.

* It may with propriety be remarked, that in the general meeting in which this motion was carried, it was only by a majority of five.

which

The public will now naturally ask, why was this rule rescinded? The fact is, it never was rescinded at all; notwithstanding Dr. Priestley has assured the public that, "the high church party, not being content with the measure, at a meeting of the subscribers, the business of which was not advertised, the former rule was rescinded," &c. p. 6. ib.

This sentence shews how easily we mistake our talents. The reverend authors will remember, in future, their failure in the field of history, though I cannot help being of opinion, they would shine like stars of the first magnitude, in that of fiction and romance.

The positive and triumphant air with which, in this place, they have peremptorily denied a fact so universally notorious, and which was mentioned to me* as a thing that had excited, in a high degree, the public attention, many weeks before the Dissenters had any idea of the storm which, perhaps, even then was gathering, can only be equalled by the reluctant manner in which they have confessed it to be utterly void of foundation in truth, without even those expressions of sorrow which common civility would have dictated upon such an occasion; and which nothing but the *odium theologicum*, from the charge of which, it is to be lamented, even the enlightened clergy

* I very well remember as I was walking from the New Meeting, one of the Sabbaths, in April, 1791, it being the first or second I ever officiated in that place, a very respectable member of that society, who was walking with me, pointing to the children of the Dissenting Sunday Schools, which were very numerous, as well as orderly and neat in their appearance, said to this effect, "I am sure you look upon those with peculiar pleasure. The spectacle is worthy of your particular notice, if you were only to consider it as a striking instance of the production of good out of evil. Had not the high church party, in this town, obliged us to separate from them on account of their inveterate bigotry and intolerance, those schools would have had no existence. But now this additional number receive the benefit of those excellent institutions.

of Birmingham cannot be wholly exonerated, could have prevented them from using.

The minutes of the society, in which all the circumstances of the first meeting, for adopting the Dissenters' proposition, are particularly stated, give no intimation of any subsequent meeting whatever on that business: nor is the silence of the minutes to be attributed to any omission in inserting the business of a public meeting of this nature; inasmuch as several gentlemen (and most of them friends to the Dissenters' measure) who have been in the constant habit of attending the public and private meetings relating to the business of Sunday schools, from the beginning, have no knowledge or recollection of any such transaction as is here stated. p. 9.

Let the reader observe, that the clergy in this sentence fairly admit the existence of the minute book of that period, otherwise they could not have known all the circumstances of the first meeting, viz. that of March, nor the silence of the same book respecting the business of the second, with respect to which it ought to be remarked, that though they rescinded the rule at a general meeting, that general meeting was held without mentioning any thing concerning this particular object.* It was by this means the rule came to be rescinded at all;—at any rate, it was the occasion that this illiberal action was done only by a part of the general body, many of the subscribers, who, had the business of the meeting been made public, would certainly have attended, being absent. There

* This rule was made at the general meeting of March 1786. If the reader will look back to the note, page 12, he will find the nature of the business particularly stated in the advertisement. Ought not the same business to have been transacted in the same manner? Transacted as it was, did it not wear the appearance of criminality? At best, was it not irregular and unfair?

is therefore, the most evident marks of management in this instance on the side of the church. For they remembered that when the business was known as it was previous to the meeting in March, it was carried on the liberal side of the question; therefore by an artifice unworthy of men, and which discovered their weakness as well as their bigotry, they permitted their intention of rescinding the rule to be known only among themselves. It will be matter of curiosity to the public to know how the silence of the minute-book is to be accounted for. We are here told, "it is not to be attributed to any omission in inserting the business of a public meeting of this nature, &c." How then is it to be accounted for?

There were, indeed, accounts received by the committee (who sit once a fortnight for the purpose of transacting the business of the institution) which gave them reason to apprehend the Dissenters had not duly executed the trust reposed in them, respecting the attendance of the children on the public worship.

This produced occasional conversations on the probable consequences which might follow from any irregularity of this kind; but farther than this, they never proceeded in the affair.

Indeed, the utmost the committee could do in the business, was to recommend to the respective visitors to propose, in default of the Dissenters in care of their children, that those children should go with the others to their respective churches, rather than be left at their own disposal on the Lord's day.

To rescind the above law was an act for which no committee was competent, and there unquestionably never was a general meeting held for any such purpose. p. 9, 10.

The

The first of these sentences which insinuates that the Dissenters betrayed the trust reposed in them; the second which mentions the alarm this treachery occasioned among the more faithful sons of the Church; the third, which panegyricizes the piety of the committee in recommending, that the children of Dissenters should go with the children of the established sect, to their respective Churches, "rather than be left at their own disposal on the Lord's day;" and the last, which communicates to us the important and unscrutable information, that "no committee was competent" to act in violation of the orders of the institution; and which denies that there ever "was a *general meeting held* for any such purpose, as that of rescinding the law in question, are rendered perfectly nugatory by the advertisement of Mr. Scholefield, which the reader will find in the note *.

* *To the Editors of the Birmingham and Stafford Chronicle.*

'SIR,

'As Mr. Burn in his reply to Dr. Priestley's Appeal, hath in the most confident and even exulting manner charged the Doctor with a gross and culpable mis-statement of facts, in relation to the Sunday schools in this Town, and asserts that the resolution of allowing the children of Dissenters to attend their own places of worship never was rescinded; you will be doing an act of justice by inserting the following paragraph, copied from the Birmingham Gazette, dated October 2, 1786, and greatly oblige,

Your humble Servant,

RADCLIFFE SCHOLEFIELD.

"Public Office, Sept. 26, 1786.

"At a General-Meeting of the Subscribers to the Sunday Schools, in Birmingham, held here this Evening,

Rev. Mr. CURTIS in the Chair;

"It being represented to this Meeting, that several Gentlemen have threatened to withdraw their subscription to the Sunday Schools, in consequence of an alteration of the general rules made at the request of the Dissenters, on Friday, the 10th of March, 1786: Resolved, that the resolution granting that request (which the Dissenters themselves have not availed themselves of, and adhered to as they engaged) be rescinded; and that in future, the rules as they originally stood, be steadily attended to."

'Who ought not to have been ignorant now?

See Burn's Pamphlet, p. 11.

'P. S. As you, Sir, frequently admit original essays, or extracts from other authors, you will probably indulge me with room for
'a few

The Doctor states a circumstance in this business which is rather curious. He says, "As there were "no children of Dissenters who wanted that instruction, "all the Sunday scholars, without exception, went to "the established church, and no complaint was ever "made of this by any Dissenter."

' a few reflections upon the foregoing extract, and Mr. Burn's extreme
' negligence and inattention in this respect to it.—What was meant in
' the resolution, by the Dissenters having not availed themselves of it,
' or attended to it, as they engaged? I believe they are wholly unin-
' formed unto this day. Perfectly satisfied with having removed so
' illiberal a restriction (a restriction unknown in any place I have
' heard of, where the Establishment and Dissenters had united in sup-
' port of Sunday Schools, and a confirmation of what Dr. Priestley
' has observed concerning the unhappy spirit prevailing in this Town)
' I never heard of their giving themselves any farther concern about it.
' I much question whether a Dissenter ever recommended an object,
' much less insisted upon their attending a place of worship among the
' Dissenters; if they did, I have no doubt of their being attended to
' by their patron. Of this I am firmly persuaded, that the rescinding
' of the resolution was the primary cause of setting up Sunday Schools
' among themselves, as separate from the Establishment. In Sheffield,
' I am informed, the subscriptions go all into one stock, from whence
' the masters and mistresses of the distinct societies are regularly paid,
' and why the same plan could not have been adopted here (except
' the spirit had prevailed which Mr. Burn so confidently denies to
' have an existence) I leave the public to form their opinion and judg-
' ment.---How Mr. Burn could have been ignorant of a fact so easily
' to be proved must be left to him, and he can best explain. From
' his ignorance, however, in this instance, the public will be ready to
' infer that his coadjutors (in whose defence he writes) have left him,
' as we say, in the lurch, or that however he blames Dr. Priestley,
' as a false accuser of the brethren, he is the first person upon whom
' (from a certain undeniable fact) the character can at present rest.
' They will likewise be enabled to judge what degree of credit is to
' be given to the other parts of his performance, which I have no
' doubt, are either in whole, or in part, capable of the same refutation;
' but, as Mr. Burn calls upon Dr. Priestley himself, to him I shall refer
' the farther part of the business, only observing, that even Mr. Burn's
' friends may now be ready to exclaim, and he himself feel in part the
' force of the exclamation, in the words of Juvenal:

' Seu tu magno Discrimine Causam,

' Protegere affectas, te Consule dic tibi quis Sis.

' Be'r thou attempt weak causes to support,

' Be sure, be very sure, thou'rt able for't. *Creech's Translation.*

I shall consider the Apology made in consequence of this advertisement at large, when I shall have done with this part of the Reply.

In this sentence we are told of a circumstance in this business rather curious, namely, that what the Doctor has advanced in one of his sentences in p. 6, of his Appeal, is an untruth; for that is what the reverend writers of the Reply wish to prove. It happens unfortunately for their argument, that this "curious" statement of Dr. Priestley, is capable of a full defence. It happens still more unfortunately for them to have afforded by a repetition of the little artifice under which they uniformly cloak their accusations, another strong and undeniable proof of that bigotry from which they seek in vain to vindicate themselves by resorting to sophistry, and misrepresentation.

With that specious and plausible air, so conspicuous in every part of this combination of skill, of logic, and of rhetoric, which smiles in your face, and talks of candour and of friendship, while it stabs you to the heart, they complain "On what authority Dr. Priestley has asserted, that no children of Dissenters wanted this instruction, we are utterly at a loss to conceive; the experience of those of us, who have attended to the business of Sunday Schools, in this town, having furnished us with repeated proofs to the contrary. Besides, Mr. Russell, in his Letter to the Chairman of the Committee (a circumstance of which Dr. Priestley ought not to have been ignorant) assures him, that the reason why the Dissenters wished the above alteration to take place *was* — that 'they *had a few poor children* to 'recommend, who, they wished, might partake the advantage of Sunday Schools, without being obliged to 'desert their own places of worship." Page 11.

Now, this is said in order to prove the charge of falsehood upon Dr. Priestley. The circumstance itself is frivolous, and would not have been taken in dudgeon by any but those who were bigotted, or by him, who still smarting under the lashes he had received, snarled and snapped at every thing—nevertheless, the charge is serious.

Now, reverend Sirs, disciples and ministers, as ye would have us believe, of Jesus Christ, should you not have had charity and sympathy enough before you laid such fast hold of this "curious circumstance," to have asked yourselves some such questions as these—May not the Doctor refer, in this place, to the time in which the Sunday Schools were first instituted? And may not Mr. Russell's Letter be posterior in date? When the Dr. speaks of no children of Dissenters, might he not have in his mind those only with whom he is more immediately connected? Indeed, it is plain, that this occurred to you, when you say—"We suspect there may possibly be some classes of Dissenters amongst us whom the Dr. knows but little of." And, as you clearly insinuate*, might not the Dr. be ignorant of the contents of Mr. Russell's letter? And might he not be unacquainted with the few (for it seems after all there were but few) poor children which the Dissenters wished to recommend? And suppose the worst that can, in this instance, be supposed—Suppose the Dr. mistakes—is not an untruth very different from a lie? Is not the Dr. like other men, subject to error? But nothing can elude the kite-like grasp of envy, malice, and revenge; and which seizes, indeed, sooner on the dove than on the bat.

Now, my countrymen, attend to the real truth of this gross insinuation, the ground of which would be too frivolous to attract your attention, did not the conclusion involve in it consequences the most serious to a character, heretofore unimpeached---to a reputation, which was the hard-earned wages of between thirty and forty years of laborious industry in the service of the public:

The Doctor, in the sentence under consideration, refers to the time in which the institution was first set on foot. It is well known, that for the size of the congregation,

* P. 11 of the Reply, two last lines but one.

gration,

gation, which assembled in the New Meeting, very few indigent people, indeed, attended; this must have been unavoidably the remark of every person, whether a stranger, or an inhabitant of Birmingham, who was ever present, in the New Meeting, during the celebration of divine service. The reverend Synod only give the Dissenters just praise, when they ironically remark, that "the Doctor's account of things, is no doubt, given with the best intention in the world; and cannot fail to shew the public how much care the Dissenters take of their own poor children; and, at the same time, their extreme liberality towards those of the establishment:" this covert attempt suggesting the contrary, has not, in this place, its desired effect; the intended irony, though very ingeniously and rhetorically contrived, becomes no longer such, because it is literally true. Now the very essence of that figure consists in speaking what is evidently the reverse of truth, respecting the object.

Men of candour, on reading this passage, would have naturally concluded the Doctor to have meant by "no Dissenters," none of the class with which he was at that time connected; for if you generalize the affirmation, you then make the Doctor, to speak of all the Dissenters in the empire of Great Britain. The members of the established sect, might at the time the Doctor refers to, have been joined only by those dissenting sects who assembled at the Old and New Meetings. The affirmation of the Doctor referring to a different period of time, may not in the least clash with the passage quoted from Mr. Russell's letter to the chairman, which might be long subsequent, unless the synod can prove, that, during the intervening space, every thing remained in *statu quo*. This being extraordinary, should have been thought worthy of particular notice; for, I dare say, they have often remarked, when preaching a funeral sermon, or a new year's discourse, that nothing in this world is so certain as change. Finally, it does not

necessarily follow from any premises or documents, laid down in these admirable pages, 10 and 11—that the Dissenters' children were under any pressing need of the instruction and advantages of the Sunday School; but only that it was wished, by the Dissenters, that these few poor children, which they recommended, might be permitted to partake of the advantage of Sunday Schools, without being obliged to desert their own places of worship. Now, though I am far from saying, that any of the reverend council are under the pressing necessity of going to school, whether it be held on Sunday or on a week day, yet, I may be permitted to say, they would derive advantage from a participation of some of the advantages which, unfortunately for the public, are the exclusive enjoyment of school boys.

I will not trouble the public with quoting the other sentences in this passage, nor point out the instances they afford of the most miserable perversion, or insinuations of the grossest and most malignant kind. In the six or seven first lines of p. 11, a compliment is insinuated with respect to the body of Dissenters; and a gross accusation, as well as wilful misapprehension made of Dr. Priestley, which every Dissenter, while he notices, will despise. In his concluding pages they have likewise insinuated, for effeminate as they are, they dare not come forward and speak out like men; they have endeavoured, by a wretched and malevolent perversion, which ill-becomes those who call themselves ministers of the religion of benevolence, to prevail upon their readers to ascribe every generous effort, made by their adversary to promote the diffusion of useful knowledge and truth, political and religious; which bigotry, superstition, despotism, and priestcraft, have ever endeavoured to conceal: to motives the most mean and selfish,—“The hope of strengthening a certain interest,—” and “the accomplishment of his favourite object—the destruction of the establishment.”

The

The public, we trust, will deem this sufficient in explanation of the real conduct observed by the high church party, in the business of Sunday Schools. Let the whole ecclesiastical junto, in the exertion of their whole united strength of wit, of argument, of logic, of base insinuation, and mean artifice, contradict this statement if they can. With respect to *facts*, they are out of the question; the public are already fully satisfied that none can be brought subversive of the allegations of the Doctor; and, therefore, we may, with safety, write the epitaph of this once triumphant falshood, and say, H. S. E. or, here lieth one *untruth*, which expired without any hope of resurrection.

STRICTURES ON THE APOLOGY,

Which appeared in Consequence of Mr. Scholefield's Advertisement.

"As I had not, at the time this business took place, any concern in the conduct of this institution, I was not prepared from my own knowledge to speak to the fact."

See Mr. Burn's Apology.

Notwithstanding this gentleman has in this part of his Apology so roundly asserted that he had not "at the time" "this business took place, any concern in the conduct of" "this institution," this is far from being ratified by his subsequent actions. For if it really was as he has stated it, Why immediately after the rescinding of this rule, did he go about, in company with a layman, soliciting, or at least receiving subscriptions for its use?

Our reverend adversary could have spoken to the fact from his own knowledge. The only preparation he needed was, that of being willing. If he was not present at the time the rule was rescinded, he was privy to it by information. From the note below, most people will conclude that he was actually present at the very time in which
this

this shameful business was transacted *. It has since appeared, that this gentleman is never prepared to speak from his own knowledge to any fact which tends to invalidate his own argument, or expose the falshood of the reverend synod's assertions or insinuations. We will not be less candid than the sanguinary laws of our country, and they allow, and even expect of the greatest and most palpable villain that ever breathed, to plead not guilty. It is even recommended by the bench to such characters, not to condemn themselves by voluntarily pleading guilty to their indictment.

Mr. Burn, with all his parade of apologizing, is far from having, in my judgment, made a becoming acknowledgment of his mistatement, which he ought to have remembered was of serious consequence. Nor do I think, that you, my countrymen, will derive from the strange apology, now before you, any greater satisfaction, with respect to the business under consideration, than you possessed before. And, with respect to the candour and integrity of the high church party, I am persuaded, this packet of depositions, this strange collection of excuses, will make you think much more lightly of them than any thing that could possibly be advanced in their prejudice by me, or by any other abler hand.

The only possible excuse Mr. Burn can make, carrying with it any circumstance in his favour, is the silence of the minutes. I wish he had resided long enough in the

* Mr. Burn, in company with Mr. Rabone, called upon a Dissenter for his subscription. The Dissenter replied, that as the rule was rescinded, he should from this time withdraw his name and his support from the institution belonging to the establishment; and he was the more confirmed in the adoption of this conduct from having learned, that the Dissenters, in consequence of this circumstance, were erecting similar institutions of their own; and as he could not support both, he should give the preference to that of the Dissenters; Mr. Burn then, turning round on his heel, said to Mr. Rabone, "I told you, how it would be;"—and yet Mr. Burn knew nothing of the matter—was quite unprepared to speak to the fact from his own knowledge!! Happy ignorance! Convenient recollection!

Univerfity to have known that an argument, *ex ignorantia*, from the circumftance of knowing nothing of the matter, is never admitted as legitimate, or poffeffing the fmalleft degree of validity; and then we fhould not have been troubled with an excufe founded on the filence of the minute book; for, after all, it appears the *minutes* were not filent. Mr. Doley tells us, “it *now* appears,” and I cannot conceive, a tolerable reafon, why it fhould not have appeared *then*, “that the whole of the refolutions paffed at a general annual meeting of the fubfcribers, convened by advertifement, and held at the Public Office, on the 26th of September, 1786, were taken by himfelf, to the printers for the purpofe of advertifing them,” &c.

It will, however, moft probably be objected, that the attention and application of Mr. Burn were intenfè and unwearied. And, I am ready to confeff, the man who dances a hornpipe, or exhibits feats of equeftrian activity, and tumbling on the rope, had a better time of it than our reverend champion. I can fancy I fee him with all the minute books, from the year 1786 inclusive, under his arm, and his bundle of depositions at his back, traversing the ftreets with the eager air of an exprefs with Gazettes extraordinary; and am willing to join my applaufe to that of the high church party, happy to have fuch an opportunity of fhewing my candour, and exercifing my impartiality, efpecially on an occafion in which all the praiſe that can be beftowed, muſt be allowed to have been dearly earned.

There is one trait which runs through the whole of Mr. Burn’s laſt letter to the public, that is by no means calculated to leave an impreffion on the mind of the reader in favour of that gentleman. All the world ſaw he was guilty of mifrepresentation, as ſoon as it ſaw Mr. Scholefield’s Advertifement. All the world ſaw the impoſſibility of ſetting aſide the allegation. The world does not thank Mr. Burn for telling them he was mifinformed. The world knew that before. In my examination

tion of that part of the clerical pamphlet relative to Sunday Schools, I flatter myself, it is clearly made out, that the charges made there against, not merely Dr. Priestley, but the whole body of Dissenters, tends directly to the production of a very serious catastrophe, I mean that of ruining their character for religion, sincerity, and even common good manners.

A man comes forward and takes all the merit of having written this accusation (let *me* not be accused of fathering this pamphlet upon Mr. Burn as its only progenitor) upon himself. It comes out to be as gross a piece of scandal as ever fell from any hireling satyrst of Grubstreet. Every one, whether friend or foe, sees and acknowledges that the writer, of that part of the Reply, defames. He comes forward again. Instead of confessing, he excuses. While he allows himself guilty, he extenuates his crime. Not the smallest trace of penitence can be discovered for having committed the worst crime one man can well commit against another, I mean that of slander. Had he possessed himself of all the documents relating to this subject, had he got the minutes from the printer, could he have destroyed all the copies of the newspaper, and poured an oblivious antidote into the mouth of every subscriber, every one sees distinctly how very serious would have been the mischief occasioned by his sly insinuations, his more confident charges, or his open and triumphant shouts of victory.

In Mr. Burn's situation, a modest man would have blushed—a tender man would have expressed sorrow—a polite man would have asked pardon—a good man would have made some recompence to the person or persons, against whom the unfounded aspersions had been levelled. I am very sure a christian, especially a christian preacher (I mean such as existed in primitive times) would have burnt every copy of a book which contained a slander as false as it is foul.

But

But has any thing like this been done? Quite the reverse is the case. Instead of blushing, he avows it with effrontery—instead of expressing any sorrow on account of having circulated an untruth, destructive of his neighbours reputation; he only tells us what we knew before, that he was “*misinformed*,” and he is very sorry that it happened to be a *misinformation*, instead of asking pardon for his offence against Dr. Priestley, and the Dissenters in particular, and of the public at large. He insults you, my countrymen, by publicly desiring, in the mean time, of his readers, that this part of his statement, with respect to the conduct of Sunday Schools, &c. may not be considered as weighing any thing in his general argument against Dr. Priestley. So, that if any of his other facts and affirmations should turn out to be unfounded in truth (and for ought we know they may), he makes the falshood of the first an argument with the public, to give the more credit to falshood the second; and this he does instead of making recompence to the person or persons against whom the aspersions were levelled; lastly, instead of suppressing the remaining copies of the edition containing this allowed scandal, he continues to sell them after having stopt, or pretended to stop its sale, till he had added this wonderful apology and a justificatory letter or two. It is, perhaps worthy of remark, that though there is an entire leaf at the end of his book perfectly blank, yet he has not (perhaps for fear of polluting it) given us any part of Mr. Scholefield’s very just remark.

To perpetrate a crime is bad enough. To persist in it is worse. To excuse it is a conduct connected with the last, and lowest degrees of human depravity. There is no depth of vileness beyond this, excepting the infamous treachery of accusing an inferior accomplice, and saying it was not I, it was my servant, it was the tool I employed, that did it.

Now

Now what has been the conduct of our reverend adversary. Instead of accusing himself, as he certainly ought to have done, of negligence ; in which article, let him be otherwise ever so good, and ever so disinterested, yet in this, he is very culpable, that he omitted a very natural and a very obvious method of solving the difficulty which puzzled him—I mean that of consulting the newspapers. I say, instead of accusing himself of negligence, he has particularly laboured his apology on that point, and has rather chosen to accuse another person—a Dissenter, it seems. If he really be a Dissenter, I hope he will be roused by the infamous manner in which he has been treated in this apology. I hope he will see through the artifice of the man, who evidently duped himself, has duped or overawed (both equally unjustifiable) a man in such a station as the pride of a priest would forbid him to own as an accomplice.

There is one thing very observable in this apology, which renders the case of all the members of our sanhedrim, truly deplorable, but which is particularly to be lamented, as it regards the reverend gentleman who wishes to be considered as their high-priest.—What I now refer to is, that loss of memory, which like one of the plagues of Egypt, seems to have suddenly fallen upon them all without distinction. And several of their friends of the laity seem not to have been within the limits of *Goshen*. Was this the work of Providence ? If it was, does it mark them out as favourites, or as foes ? If it was their own doing, was it an action of folly, or of wisdom ? Let us suppose this last to be the true state of the case, and we have to lament they did not give some friendly notice beforehand. Then this would in some sort have answered the end of the blood on the door-post of Israel, and might have prevented the slaughter of their *first-born*. Because if I had known of this universal destruction of memory from the faculties of every high churchman's mind, and that they had the power of destroying it from the mind of every other

other man of whatever religion, provided he was in any shape dependent upon them, I would not have troubled myself to refute this book. I might perhaps have told the public, and that would have been the utmost, that it was the production of insane persons, then permitted it to live its full term, and at the appointed period to have quietly paid, without any hastening by affright or violence, its debt to nature. One would absolutely suppose they had discovered a spring supplied with the waters of Lethe, and when occasion required, had all drank of it. If this be really the case, I would advise them to leave off pamphleteering, and get a patent for this cordial. If this really be the case, I congratulate them, and that on more accounts than one. It was very convenient in this instance, that they should remember to forget. And if they were to secure an exclusive right to it by Letters Patent, as Dr. Katterfelto, if he were possessed of it, certainly would, they would find many a rich nabob, African slave-merchant, or superannuated lord of the treasury, who would give much to pledge them in a bowl of that sweet oblivious antidote, which would so conveniently erase the written troubles of the brain, and cleanse the foul bosom of that perilous stuff which weighs down nature.

Indeed, I wish they may be able before the appearance of my next number, to repeat their draught, lest they should be tempted to commit some worse depredation upon themselves, than that of destroying their memories.

Mr. Burn in having lost his retentive powers is unfortunate above all the rest. The speaker who delivers his rhetorical effusions extempore, deprived of memory, whether wilfully, or by the visitation of heaven, must often find himself at a stand. Indeed, I have no conception how he can possibly go on at all. In this case too, it is a public loss, his hearers will certainly experience the ill effects of this mental deprivation of their pastor, although not of that
nature

nature to render him dangerous with respect to the persons of his flock. It may subject them to perpetual tautologies, and repetitions at one time, and at another to sit expecting in vain the arrival of the conductor of their devotions, who ignorant through default of memory, that the sabbath, or the saint's-day is arrived, may be collecting affidavits, arranging materials, preparing advertisements, or correcting a proof sheet, containing documents of such ponderous and substantial import, as to overwhelm and bury everlastingly, the whole body of Dissenters.

The Fairy Tales, the history of Tom Thumb, or even of Jack the Giant killer, nay not one of the seven voyages of Sindbad the Sailor, can furnish us with any imaginary event half so marvellous as what has really happened in the town of Birmingham. I am apt to think that the late Mr. Hume, would be puzzled on the doctrine of miracles, were he now alive. He saith "As an uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a direct and full *proof* from the nature of the fact against the existence of any miracle; nor can such a proof be destroyed, or the miracle rendered creditable, but by an opposite proof which is superior." Now uniform experience tells us, that eight men who have been eye, or ear witnesses, or both, to an event which happened six or seven years ago, which was the subject of common conversation, and very notoriously public; which event was productive of another event, equally notorious, if not more so; in both which events they were all and each of them personally interested, and not only so, but instrumental in bringing about; that they should all of them, all at once forget, that ever the rule was rescinded, or a Sunday School which now exists a living testimony of the rescinding of that rule, which Sunday School originated in that event and had no other origin, is a circumstance in the highest degree improbable, if not absolutely impossible. In consideration of this, would not Mr. Hume have argued, 'This is a violation of the laws
of

of nature; i. e. a miracle according to the definition; for unalterable experience has established it as a law, that the memory of even two persons shall be admitted as sufficient in the most important cases to establish or to overturn any fact; which proceeds upon the principle that two persons, *compos mentis* at the time, and in the interim between the occurrence of the event, and the time in which he gives his evidence cannot possibly forget any important circumstances, in an affair of moment to which they were personally witnesses, whether by the eye, or the ear, or both; especially if they themselves were concerned in the business. The testimony of memory suffices in affairs of life and death, when given by no more than two persons, unless their testimony be invalidated by a proof that they labour under a natural or a moral incapacity for bearing that testimony. This is established on a law of the human mind, which is at the same time a law of nature, that a man cannot possibly forget any transaction of moment, unless he becomes superannuated, or is incapacitated by sickness, or accident. But here are no less than eight persons who unanimously affirm, and in the most public manner, depose with the subscription of their signatures, that they have entirely lost all memory of an event, a remarkable event, an important event, an event which so many persons knew, and which so many persons recollect to have taken place, which was not done in a corner, but in the presence of at least fifty persons, which produced another very notorious event, (for it is evident if the rule had not been rescinded, there would have been no Sunday School among the Dissenters.) I say that eight respectable persons, most of whom were present at the time, three of which were clergymen of the established church, one of these a solicitor or collector of subscriptions for the Sunday Schools, the other chairman at the very time the law was rescinded, who in fact rescinded it himself; for upon there being a division, when

‘ when the numbers were cast up, and found to be equal,
 ‘ the reverend chairman said, WHAT ! is there JUST AS
 ‘ MANY FOR, AS AGAINST THE MOTION. Then if I am
 ‘ TO DETERMINE THE MATTER, IT GOES— and drawing
 ‘ his pen over the rule, gave his casting vote for rescinding
 ‘ the order; that another reverend gentleman whose atten-
 ‘ tions to the concerns of this institution are in the very
 ‘ apology acknowledged, to have “been unremitting from
 ‘ its very commencement,” ‘ that a fourth who was secre-
 ‘ tary to that society, who wrote with his own hand the
 ‘ minutes of that very meeting, and with his own hand
 ‘ carried them to the printer---that the “respectable indi-
 ‘ viduals, Mr. Josiah Pratt, Mr. John Ward, Mr. Parker,
 ‘ and the late Mr. Allison, all of them members of the
 ‘ very committee, who rescinded the rule, and all of them
 ‘ in the habit of constant attendance on the business of
 ‘ Sunday Schools from their very commencement, to
 ‘ whom application was made, and enquiries of them were
 ‘ repeated frequently in the course of several weeks.” ‘ I
 ‘ say that all these eight men, respectable, sensible, and no
 ‘ doubt impartial, upright and perfectly in their senses both
 ‘ at the time in which the event occurred, and likewise in
 ‘ the intervening period. I say that these eight accomplished
 ‘ persons, should all of them, all at once so compleatly for-
 ‘ get this transaction so very important in its nature, and in
 ‘ its consequences—which made so much noise—which is
 ‘ in the recollection of so many, —and in the performance
 ‘ of which they themselves were personally and individually
 ‘ concerned---should so entirely lose their recollection in
 ‘ this instance, while they they retain it in the most perfect
 ‘ manner in every other ; and to so great a degree as re-
 ‘ peatedly to declare “they had no recollection of any such
 ‘ meeting or transaction as was stated by Dr. Priestley,”
 ‘ appears to me an absolute violation of the laws of nature,
 ‘ that is to say a miracle---if such a thing had happened,
 ‘ these people, all or every one, or some one of them must
 ‘ have

' have recollected it.' Was Mr. Hume then, now living, he must either renounce his principles, or believe a most evident and undeniable truth to be a falshood.

Indeed, it is but justice to Mr. Hume to say, that he draws the consequence in the following manner, at the same time calling it a general maxim, worthy of our attention: viz. "That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falshood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavours to establish. And even in that case, there is a mutual destruction of arguments, and the superior only gives us an assurance suitable to that degree of force which remains after deducting the inferior*." There is the most undeniable proof that the rule was rescinded, contained in the advertisements still extant in the Birmingham Gazette, and there is the most positive testimony that the rescinding of the rule, though so important in its own nature, attended with such peculiar circumstances, and followed by such serious and remarkable consequences, as those of an equal division, of the casting-vote lying with the chairman; the separation of the Dissenters, and their erection of Sunday Schools for themselves; yet there is the most public and positive testimony given by eight very reputable and well known characters, that they all and every one of them entirely forgot this business, in the transaction of which, they all and every one of them either immediately or remotely, had a hand. Now all that Mr. Hume would have to determine would be this, Which of these facts has the strongest evidence in favour of it—the occurrence of the event as stated by Dr. Priestley in his Appeal: Or the forgetfulness (unexampled in any history that I ever saw) of eight persons, who were eye or ear-witnesses that the business was transacted? Which is the most miraculous falshood, The assertion that the rule was

* Hume's Essays, Sect. X. Vol. II.

rescinded—or, That eight persons should forswear themselves.

Perhaps Mr. Hume would put it thus, “Is it more
“probable that eight reputable persons should agree to
“affirm a palpable falshood to be truth, in the most public and solemn form of asseveration—or, That this notorious event, in the production of which they were all
“one way or other concerned, should be so completely
“obliterated from each person’s memory, he all the
“while remaining in perfect mental and corporeal sanity?”
And this, my countrymen, is what I leave to your determination.

I confess I cannot help thinking the apology has on the side of our adversaries, marred instead of mending the matter. Sincerity will go farther than such soaring policy—I was very near calling it falshood. There are several things which I could farther remark in proof of this remedy being worse than the disease. It carries its own refutation along with it. The apology affirms that Mr. Doley, of whose dissent from the established sect we are carefully reminded, “confidently assured” one of the Rev. authors of the Reply, that “he *believed* no such business “had taken place”—he “BELIEVED”—The *assurance* only was “confident,” the answer was full of hesitation and dubiety.

A second application was made to this person, at which time Mr. Scholefield’s paragraph, which had just then made its appearance, instead of assisting his memory, appears to have destroyed what little there was remaining. For, “even *then* he declared in the presence of two witnesses, that he had not *any* recollection of the business.”

Surely some potion must have been administered to this man, if to no other of this octonian club of Forgetters,
the

the effects of which appear to have been worked off in the letter he has subjoined to Mr. Burn's apology, where he accurately recollects all about it. "His having neglected "to insert in the minute-book the resolutions passed at a "general annual meeting of the subscribers convened by "advertisement, and held at the Public Office on the 26th "of September, 1786," and still farther, that "the whole "of the resolutions of the meeting were taken by himself "to the printers, for the purpose of advertising them in "the papers of the Thursday and Monday following, and "that he unfortunately forgot to call for them again; "and that this neglect on his part occasioned their not "being entered into the minutes of the institution."

I congratulate this useful personage upon his recovery from that partial insanity under which he laboured. I hope his reverend coadjutors will in due time likewise be restored. When that desirable event shall take place, their townsmen cannot, without behaving unhandsomely, do less than illuminate. Hopes may be cherished on this head, for look at Mr. Doley's letter, and you will find that he there recollects time, place, and other minuter circumstances.

Though Mr. Doley very candidly and charitably hopes the public will lay all the blame upon him, and none upon Mr. Burn, I should like just to ask that last mentioned reverend Divine, why, before he ventured upon such triumphant expressions, and victorious exultations over Dr. Priestley.---Why, he did not narrowly inspect the minute book? How he could be so devoid of common discernment, not to miss the whole minutes of a general annual meeting? How he could have so little common sense, as not to know that any man acquainted with public business, would naturally ask, "if the minutes were entirely "missing for eighty six, how was it possible for them to "settle the business, of that year, in eighty seven?" If he did actually observe that they were missing; would it not

have been more consistent with the character of a faithful historian, to have enquired after them till he had learnt something certain with respect to them, than it was to argue so roundly from their mere silence, especially when he thought the "Doctor would not have risked his assertion without some kind of authority?" He must have known that there was a general meeting, and that minutes must have been made at it, and that those minutes must have been to be found somewhere; he must have known that they were always inserted in the Birmingham papers, &c. he might also have known that every printer makes a point of detaining the copy of any thing, whether advertisement or paragraph, that is inserted in his paper—would not any man then with a single grain of common sense have naturally applied to the printers of the papers, as soon as ever he had missed the minutes of a general meeting in the minute book? I am ready to suspect some collusion in this business---I know what the good sense of a Roman would have dictated to him on such an occasion; he would have said "*I should not believe this story were it told me by CATO.*" Had Falstaff instead of his story of the men in buckram, told HAL such a tale as this, the prince would have said in reply, "these lies are like the father that begets them; gross as a mountain, open, palpable."

Why was this business huddled over without being mentioned in the advertisement? And is there not the appearance of design in the omission of their secretary to insert them in the book just in that particular instance, contrary to his uniform practice? Had he received instructions for that purpose? If he had not, Why was he not discharged, or at least reprimanded? And finally, Why is the apology so limping and awkward, and so full of self refutation.

I will leave my antagonists to answer these questions—they are all honourable men—all no doubt; and will conclude

clude with remarking to you, that in some instances we must hesitate concerning the reports of others. When opposite circumstances occasion any doubt, or uncertainty, we ought to balance them, and incline to that side on which we discover the superiority. Contrariety of evidence may be derived from different causes; from the opposition of contrary testimony; from the character or number of the witnesses; from the manner of their delivering their testimony; or from the union of all these circumstances. We entertain a suspicion concerning any matter of fact when the witnesses contradict each other; when they are of a doubtful character; when they have an interest in what they affirm; when they deliver their testimony with hesitation, or on the contrary with too *violent asseverations*. These remarks are worthy of your attention while you deliberate upon the matter before you, the recollection of them will be of service to you, in forming a judgment between the parties.

The impolicy of our adversaries will be discerned by every one. For they who do not at their first setting out solidly establish and actually deserve a character of truth, ingenuousness, and probity, may impose and shine as meteors do, brilliant for a short time; but will very soon vanish into darkness, or be extinguished with contempt. The wild fables of fancy are at most only believed while they are telling; the most enchanting visions of the imagination are broken and lost with the slumbers that produced them; but the words of *truth* shall remain when the heavens are no more, her decisions shall endure to ages of ages.

I remain my Countrymen,

With the greatest respect,

Your faithful Servant,

May 14, 1791.

J. EDWARDS.

Part III. of these Letters will be published in a few days.